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ABSTRACT

In 1988, the Forrest City Alternative School (Arkansas) began a program to provide care for the preschool children of teen mothers who wanted to obtain their high school diplomas. The children ranged in age from 8 weeks to 3 years in the infant/toddler group and 3-6 years in the child care group. These children were provided with care, preschool training, nutrition, health, and social services. In addition, a class of Job Training Partnership Act students was provided training and a certificate in child care services, using the day care center as a laboratory for training. Over 100 families benefited from this child care program. It lowered the dropout rate among girls in the Forrest City schools, increased employability skills, and improved literacy. Children enrolled in the child development program showed readiness for learning in the structured environment of the school system. (YLB)

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FINAL REPORT

INFANT/TODDLER CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
FORREST CITY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL
FORREST CITY, ARKANSAS

Conducted by
Forrest City Public Schools
334 Graham Street
Forrest City, Arkansas 72335

In Cooperation with
Vocational and Technical Education Division
Arkansas Department of Education
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

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ABSTRACT

PROJECT NUMBER: 2B089

PROJECT TITLE: Infant/Toddler Developmental Program

ORGANIZATION: Forrest City School District
Forrest City, Arkansas

FUNDS RECEIVED: $61,000

OBJECTIVES:

1. To remove barriers to students' acquiring a strong foundation in academic subjects and marketable job skills.
2. To provide the children of young mothers with pre-school training in four major areas - language development, physical development, independent thinking skills, and socialization skills;
3. To provide students with entry-level skills in the area of child care and train the student to meet the challenges of parenting.

APPROACH: Two rooms were licensed at the Forrest City Alternative School to train and care for the pre-school children of young women who wanted to obtain their high school diploma. These were children eight weeks to three years in the infant/toddler group and three to six in the child care group. These children were provided with care, pre-school training, nutrition, health and social services. In addition, a class of JTPA students was provided training and a certificate in child care services, using the day care center as a laboratory for training.

CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION:

Over 100 families have benefitted from this child-care program. It has lowered the dropout rate among girls in the Forrest City schools. It has increased employability skills and improved literacy. Children enrolled in the child development program have shown readiness for learning in the structured environment of the school system.

Introduction

The Community. The Infant/Toddler Developmental Program is located at the Forrest City Alternative School in Forrest City, Arkansas, population 13,364. Forrest City is the county seat of rural St. Francis County, population 28,249. Demographic statistics reveal St. Francis County to be economically depressed, with an unemployment rate of 12.7%, the third highest in the state. Only about 45% of the population in St. Francis County has graduated from high school. This is partly due to the loss of disproportionate numbers of the more highly educated young people, and an increasingly elderly population eligible for government transfer programs. According to the Arkansas Department of Health, St. Francis County ranks fifth in the numbers of teen pregnancies per 1,000 live births. Although the *Rural Profile of Arkansas* indicates 27.8% of households in St. Francis County were below poverty level in 1980, with 30.8 AFDC recipients per 1,000 people in 1989, administrators at the local Department of Human Services state there are presently 1,067 women in St. Francis County who receive AFDC for their children. With the loss in population shown by the 1990 census, from 30,858 to 28,249, this translates into 37.8 AFDC recipients per 1,000 population, a significant 7% increase. Spokespeople for the Regional Council for Children's Services have stated that growing up in persistent poverty virtually guarantees that children will be impaired socially, mentally and educationally for life.

The School Setting. The Forrest City Alternative School is located in a black residential area, in the former Stewart Intermediate Building, a red brick structure built in 1962 and enlarged in 1966, with 16,000 square feet of floor space.

The Forrest City High School has experienced a high rate of dropouts. Teen pregnancy is the major reason for girls dropping out of high school in Forrest City. Because many of the students are in a higher grade than their parents were when they dropped out of school, and because there are many barriers to their completion of high school, including child care and transportation, there is very little incentive to stay in school.

The Infant/Toddler Development Program at the Forrest City Alternative School offers a solution to these problems. The program is designed to meet the needs of those students who want to finish high school, but have the responsibility of a child, or children. It offers high quality child care during school hours, and transportation for the mother and child on a school van.

Objectives

The purpose of the Infant/Toddler Developmental Program is to enable young women to complete their high school education, contribute to the work force, and make a better life for themselves.

Goals:

(1) To remove barriers to students' acquiring a strong foundation in academic subjects and marketable job skills;

(2) To provide the children of young mothers with pre-school training in four major areas:

a. Language development;
b. Physical development;
c. Independent thinking skills;
d. Socialization skills;

(3) To provide students with entry-level skills in the area of child care and train the student to meet the challenges of parenting.

Objectives

(1) A nutritional breakfast and lunch;

(2) A daily health check of children attending the program;

(3) A teaching and play schedule which allows the child to progress emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually;

(4) An interesting and varied program which builds child nurturing and parenting skills in the Occupational Home Economics Child Care students.

Procedures

The Infant/Toddler Child Developmental Program is staffed by a part-time program director, Mrs. Ozaree Twillie, two child care providers, Yvern Culler and Berta Roberson, and students taking the Child Care and Guidance

Management and Service class through Jobs Training Partnership Act stipends.

Mrs. Twillie, a secondary home economics teacher, submitted a proposal to the Vocational Technical Division, Arkansas Department of Education three years ago for funding for the Infant/Toddler Child Development Program and was successful in obtaining funding in the amount of $61,000 for the project.

The program is open daily during regular school hours, and is two-fold. It provides high-quality care and training for the children attending the center, and training in child care for students attending the Occupational Home Economics Child Care and Guidance Management and Services classes. These students use the child care center as a laboratory for training and receive a certificate after completion of the course.

The Infant/Toddler Child Developmental Program was designed to accommodate the students in the Forrest City Alternative School who have the responsibility of caring for their child or children. The students can bring their child to the center, where it will receive good nutrition and care, early training in basic living skills, experience in the socialization process, and creative and guided learning experiences, as well as self-selected activities.

Each year approximately 60 to 70 Forrest City High School girls become pregnant. This program enables these young women to remain in school while securing a high school

diploma or a GED (General Education Degree). Many students who have dropped out of school re-enter the Alternative School with a new incentive to complete their secondary education, mainly because of this unique setting.

The Infant/Toddler Developmental Program is a basic entity of the Forrest City Alternative School, which enrolls approximately 100 students each year. It provides the necessary assistance to insure students complete their high school education. Two licenses have been issued to the facility, which allows it to accommodate children up to school age (Infant/Toddler, eight weeks up to three years old, and Child Care two and one-half up to six years old). Each program is licensed for 20 children, making a total of 40. Transportation, breakfast, and lunch are furnished. An on-site social worker and Vista workers are provided. A school nurse is on call and transportation to the health center or the doctor is provided when necessary. Parents are occasionally called into the center if the child is fretful, or appears to be needing the parent's attention. There is a turnover in center participants. Usually, there are 13 to 14 infants/toddlers, and approximately six older children, ages three to six. Approximately 15 students take part in the Occupational Home Economics Child Care classes, and approximately nine complete the course and receive their certificate each year.

The impact of the program beyond the classroom is growing. JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) sends clients to the program for on-the-job training. Three persons from the Grandparent Program sponsored by the public schools works in the program. Food service workers at the public schools have invited parents receiving Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services to hear County Extension home economists on choosing food for infants and children.

The Occupational Home Economics students have been busy making children's learning books, mobiles, place mats, and pictures relating to the child's world, all of which have added to the children's growth and development, as well as improved the student's skills in child nurturing.

Evaluation

The 1990-91 school year was the last year of funding for the Infant/Toddler Child Development Program. The program has served over 100 children and their student parents who attended the Forrest City Alternative School. The support services provided through the I/T program has helped to improve the quality of life of those served, has helped build self-esteem in young women, and has improved the family relationships. The positive impact on many of these young lives is incalculable.

Follow-up reports on children who have attended the child care center reveals that all are progressing at grade level or above. Students presently in the child care center have learned their telephone numbers, addresses, and can

spell their first name. Students in the Occupational Home Economics Child Care and Guidance Management and Services improve in daily anecdotal record observations. Test scores average right at the 75th percentile level.

With guided learning activities, students gain in creativity and creative ideas. Art is an enjoyable subject for the students, which integrates well with home economics. Students have been innovative in doing the bulletin boards in the classrooms. They have gained confidence in themselves. They recently enjoyed a field trip to a child care facility in West Memphis, Arkansas. Several students attended the Home-Based Business Seminar held at East Arkansas Community College, and sponsored by the Extension Service.

A synopsis of this program has been printed in the January/February 1991 *Illinois Teacher* magazine and the Fall, 1989 issue of the *Arkansas Vocational Visitor*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is a worthwhile program which fills a real need in the Forrest City school system, but which is threatened with a lack of sufficient funding. The school has forwarded an application to the U.S. Department of Education's School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program which would continue the program, if funded. Problems the program has encountered have included a lack of playground equipment, a need for chairs and strollers, and a lack of permanent employees and a full-time director.

Its accomplishments have enabled over 100 students to complete a high school education or GED, and providing parenting skills to parents and pre-school training which has enabled their children to do better in the school system.